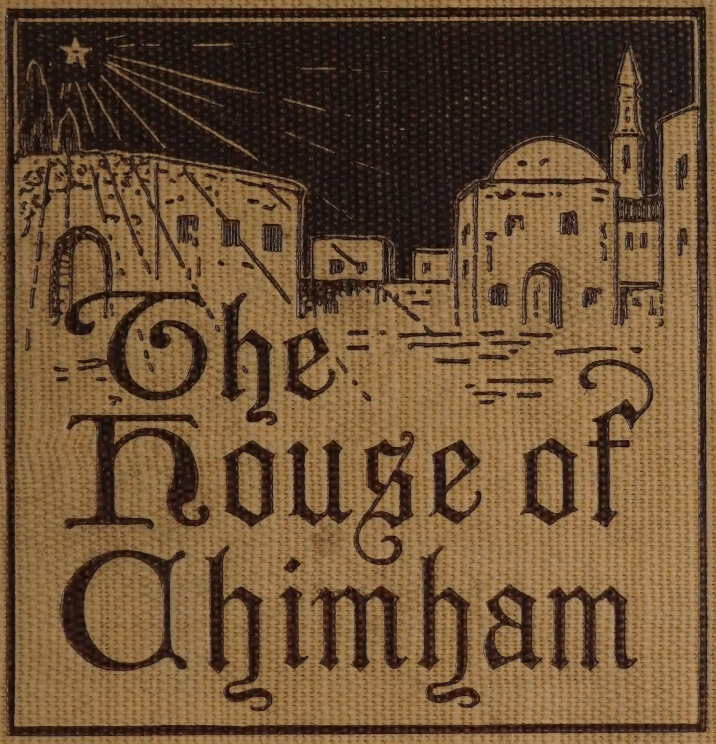

The House of Ahimham

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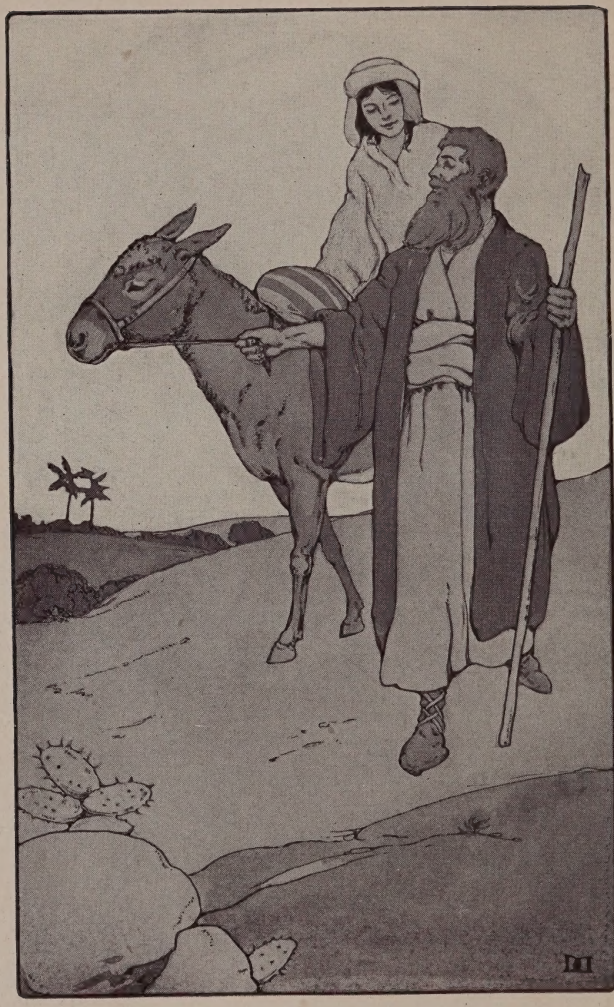

"BLITHELY THEY WENT UPON THEIR WAY."

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THE HOUSE OF CHIMHAM

By

EDGAR WHITAKER WORK

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To
The Sweet Memory
of a brown-eyed Boy
of thirteen summers
who was already in love
with the beauty of the world
when God called him into His own
Limitless Beauty

THE HOUSE OF CHIMHAM

"THERE is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green fields."

How deep into the great Past the roots of the wondrous story go, and what preparation it had in the instincts and chivalries of men—

How a long-ago kindly deed grew and ripened with the years, and how it contributed to the world's Great Surprise—

How such kingly forces of men as Friendship, Love and Hope were

preserved and beautified through the lapse of time, and were caught up at length into God's own Fine Romance—

How commonplace names and things were enveloped in a large Purpose, grew silently into a profound meaning, and shone in the fine light of Duty, Hope and Service—

All this and more is the story of the House of Chimham.

It began away yonder in a distant century, but its fragrance lingers upon the air; its beauty hovers above the hearthstone; its impulse is like iron in the blood of men.

It began—and it is not finished. It never can be finished; for it belongs to that rich store of wonder in the human heart which ages of history cannot exhaust. It is near to all kindly hearts and brave endeavors. Its touch rests silently upon all

loving loyalty, all quiet chivalry. Its grace blossoms with more than nature's spring-time wonder into the fruit of character, and its fulness is the whole world's Desire and Promise.

All this and more is the story of the House of Chimham. Its material is first history, but afterwards it is something more—it is Imagination, it is Beauty, it is Hope; it is all that makes life worth the living.

In the long-ago a man came forth to greet the King, gave him his heart's welcome, brought gifts to him, soothed his sorrow, and supported his need. And as the years went by, those who came after him, bound by some great *noblesse oblige*, continued to make ready for the King, looked into the face of each guest who came to discern a Greater Presence, until at length in the long reward of time the true King came,

the True Guest also of that world which is in the heart of man.

And when the True Guest came, his coming was the fulfilment of many promises, not alone of written prophecies, but of unwritten prophecies that grow richly in the hearts of those who set themselves grandly yet simply to love and serve.

This is the story of the House of Chimham, some broken words and phrases of which are to be written here. Poor, faded name of the long-ago! Yet perchance it deserves to be written close to that Name whose light can never fade.

"THE Bactrian was but a wild childish man,
And could not write nor speak, but only loved."

If the rocks of Olivet could speak, they would unfold many a tale of pathos. For in days gone by, when men were overshadowed by sorrow, they turned often to the slopes and heights of Olivet, as if its solitude might comfort theirs. So in the day when sorrow pierced his soul, royal David "passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness." In all the days since that day many have climbed the steeps of Olivet with David, for the heart of man lies buried deep in this fathomless Book of Life.

Slowly we see him go out into the land of tears, his pain not of the

body, but of the soul. "And all the country wept with a loud voice." It is a pity to see a King bowed down and sorrowful! Behind in the city were the pomp and glory of the kingdom, but the King himself went forth in pathetic solitude into the friendless world. Heavy were his footsteps, but heavier still was his heart, and fear and haste were in his blood. In later days the memory of this painful journey "toward the way of the wilderness" swept across the music of his harp, and left a minor strain trembling in his Hymns of Praise.

"And David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered, and went barefoot." How often has history told us of the changing order of the world. Early English chronicles relate the story of King Ine. One

day Ine feasted royally in his country house. On the morrow he rode forth in the morning, flushed with pride, only to be met by his queen Æthelburgh, who bade him turn back. And when the king returned, he found his house stripped of curtains and vessels, and foul with refuse and the dung of cattle. In the royal bed where the king had slept lay a sow with her farrow of pigs, whilst the queen stood amidst the ruin and said: "See, my lord, how the fashion of this world passeth away."

It is the lesson all must learn. But there is more to learn. They who travel by way of Olivet out into the land of tears are not alone. The Great Companion is not dead. His shade is round about them to keep them, and the trustful heart will know that He is nigh. And lest the soul may suffer those grave

and painful doubts which men are apt to feel toward the Unseen Friend in hours of grief, it is His good will to send companions of the way, who speak our language and share our weakness.

What a treasure the heart has in the memory of those companions of the way, who drew near and walked with us into the land of tears!

Let us write the names of David's friends, who hailed him on the way toward the wilderness.

Blessed be Ittai the Gittite! Dim, far-distant name he bears, but his voice like the sweet note of a flute sounds from the banks of the brook Kidron—"As Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will thy servant be."

And blessed be Hushai the Archite! It was at "the top of the as-

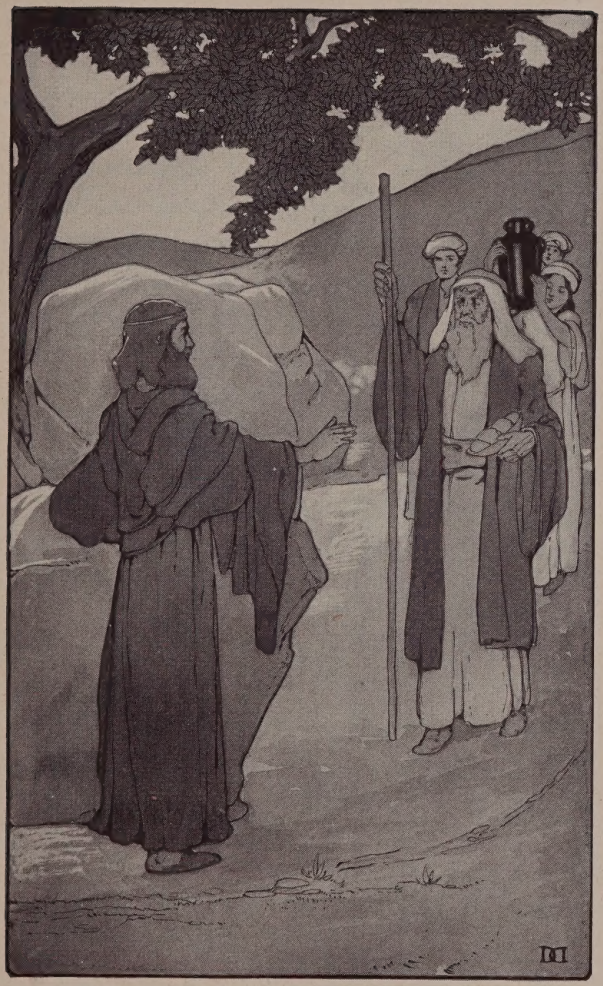
cent," where the heart leaped in anxious haste, and the breath came and went in fear—it was here that Hushai met him, "with his coat rent, and earth upon his head." "So Hushai, David's friend"—his name obscure but his title universal!—"came into the city!"

And blessed be Abishai the son of Zeruiah! When Shimei cursed, following along the hillside, and throwing stones and dust at the king, then this rude son of a strong mother flamed forth in boundless indignation: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head."

And blessed be Jonathan and Ahimaaz, sons of the priests, who went "over the brook of water" for love and loyalty's sake! And blessed be the nameless woman who "spread the covering over the well's

mouth, and strewed bruised corn thereon!" And blessed be still other companions of his way! These are the chivalries that shorten the way, and gird men with strength and courage.

And the king traveled on the Way of Sorrow, on over the Jordan, on into the land of Gilead. And when he came to Mahanaim, the greatest though the humblest of his appointed friends came to meet him. Down from the heights of Rogelim he came, an old man of fourscore years. Painters have not often caught his figure upon their canvases, yet it is a majestic and friendly figure. His eyesight was dim, and his ears were dull, but his heart was buoyant with friendship, and his pulses beat the high rhythm of love that makes the music of the world. Out of the wilderness he came, yet his arms were full of gifts and his heart over-



"DOWN FROM THE HEIGHTS OF ROGELIM HE CAME."

flowed in welcome. Beds he brought for the king's weariness, and basins and earthen vessels for his comfort; and for food such abundance as beggars description—wheat and barley and flour and parched corn and beans and lentils and parched pulse, and honey and butter and sheep and cheese of kine!

This was Barzillai the Gileadite. Out over the long tract of years his deed of friendship shines, with a silver sheen that reaches upward to the sky. Blessed be Barzillai!

"FOR life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is."

Write the name of Barzillai the Gileadite in that none too long list of great and loving friends by which the world has grown rich!

All the days of the king's exile Barzillai provided him sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim. "For he was a very great man!"—great in the gifts of his heart as well as in the gifts of his hands. He was of that gracious circle of men who follow a compact of friendship, and whether in the city or in the wilderness, they look beyond the faces of men to see the face of the Unseen.

"Hush! I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be—God!"

He knew not how far his good deed would reach. He believed unconsciously in the immortality of goodness. He invested his kindness in the years and left it to gather interest from the skies. Solitary figure of a day long dead—a silhouette against the blue sky of Gilead! Yet is he also as a priest of the good things of God, and a prophet likewise "of the wonder and bloom of the world," wherein all may have a share.

When the peril was over, and the king was ready to return to the city, it was in his heart to show his gratitude to the old man of Rogelim, who without stint had poured out for him in his distress the sweets of friendship. It was the day of the king's departure, and the scene enacted that day might well be hung

in the gallery of masterpieces, wherein men are seen in the grandeur of simplicity.

Down from the heights of Rogelim came the old man, the weight of fourscore years not enough to detain him, for he was minded to go a little way over Jordan with his royal friend.

"Come thou over with me, and I will sustain thee with me in Jerusalem." It was the king who spoke, anxious to prove his gratitude.

But the old man had not thought of reward—he had but planted in the desert a few seeds of love, to grow and blossom as they would.

"How many are the days of the years of my life," he replied, "that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day fourscore years old; can I discern between good and bad? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I

drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Thy servant would but just go over the Jordan with the king; and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?" Thus spoke the old man eloquent.

"Let thy servant, I pray thee," he continued, with the irresistible appeal of filial regard, "turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, by the grave of my father and my mother." Where is the heart of son or daughter that does not echo the words—"the grave of my father and my mother"?

Yet was he not careless of the worth of royal benefits. They were not for him to enjoy, for soon he must be gathered unto his fathers. Men live in their children, and

daily the world is lifted by the aspirations and sacrifices of fathers and mothers for those who are bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. And Barzillai said to the king: "But behold, thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee."

And the king answered, "Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee." Then came a scene like a cameo set in pearls, fit to be worn as the ornament of peasants or of kings — "The king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place."

But Chimham, his son, went with David over Jordan, and on to the royal city of his abode. We know not his stature, nor his mien; nevertheless his name slips into the fade-

less history that moves on to the world's great day.

To the end of his days David remembered the kindness of the stranger who met him and sustained him in the land of tears beyond the Jordan. At the royal table a place was reserved for Chimham, that he might eat of the king's meat in memory of his father's deed. And when the days drew on that David should go the way of all the earth, the memory of his great friend in Gilead was fresh and strong within his failing heart, and with his dying breath he commended to his son Solomon "the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite."

And something more King David did, whereon hangs the thread of a wondrous history. To Chimham he gave a portion of his own patrimony at Bethlehem, a bit of land once belonging to the field of his

ancestor, the lusty farmer Boaz, where also the sweet Moabitish maiden had gleaned and sung, anxious only for her daily bread, and dreaming not of the wonder that should be.

"The fountains of Hebraic song
Are in thy heart, fair Ruth,
Fountains whose tides are deep and strong,
In deathless love and truth."

In the same field also David, the shepherd boy, ruddy and of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look upon, had watched his flocks and tuned his shepherd's pipes, all unconscious too of the wondrous history that was beckoning him on.

So it came to pass that at Bethlehem, on David's portion of land, Chimham built his caravansary—or khan for the wayfarer. It bore his name, for was it not called *Geruth Chimham*, the Lodging-Place kept by the son of Barzillai, "which is by Bethlehem"?

"LET me live in a house by the side of the road,
Where the race of men go by—
The men who are good and the men who are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban;—
Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
And be a friend to man."

So at Bethlehem, David's town, close to the traveler's way, stood *Geruth Chimham*, and gave its welcome, as the old man of Rogelim had once welcomed the king, to the passer-by. It had no outward grandeur, its walls were plain and its courtyard not over large; yet was it better than a Palace of Art, for the footfall of man at its threshold was ever a gladsome sound.

Men looked upon it and knew not that it had an uncommon story.

To them it seemed, as so often seem the common mysteries of every day, an ordinary thing that men should keep an inn and welcome the stranger passing by. They saw not —how can men see except their eyes be anointed?—the light that rested already upon the hill tops of David's town, and drifted in cloud-like masses, as if driven by a master-hand, toward the House of Chimham. Nevertheless it was a silent monument of friendship, a reminder of the fact that life is not common, but uncommon, and full of surprise; and because it was a kindly deed that laid its foundations, the House of Chimham grew in the years into a beautiful history.

Always the House of Chimham had a wide-open door, and its hosts from generation to generation were men of generous mien. In the Bethlehem inn men were sure to

find something more than entertainment—they found hospitality, which is a larger and finer grace. Its fame spread near and far, and often the traveler quickened his pace and pushed forward on the way, anxious to lie down at night under the hospitable care of Chimham's khan. Shepherds passing from the pastures of the south-land to the markets of the north, and the drivers of droves of asses also, rejoiced when they saw the hills of Bethlehem, for they said—"Now we are nigh to the House of Chimham, where both man and beast are comforted."

Thus the shadow of Barzillai the Gileadite seemed to fall out across the years, and his gracious hospitality renewed itself constantly in the deeds of men. The heritage of a gentle spirit, how good a thing it is! It lies deep in the blood, nor

can generations of rude custom wholly expel it. Once or twice only in the lapse of years the House of Chimham had hosts who were unloving men, whose hearts turned to gain more than to their fellow-men. In those days decay threatened the ancient inn. The flowers that were wont to grow in the pathway that led to the door turned pale and sickly, and the vines that clustered upon the walls fell away. A new presence, something dark and unwholesome, crept across the threshold, and seemed for the time at home in the inn, and the inn itself seemed about to become

> "A spot of dull stagnation, without light
> Or power of movement."

It was the decay of selfishness that threatened the House of Chimham. But happily other hosts came to take the place of unloving men, and light again the old fire of love

on the hearth-stone, and sing once more the old refrain of welcome to weary men.

Little by little in some strange way the House of Chimham came to embody much that was in the souls of men. It grew to be a shrine of human feeling, a place where the hearts of men leaped up within them, and longed for something better. Often the traveler came and lodged in the House of Chimham, and went on his way a better man. He might not explain what had taken place, nor was he even more than dimly conscious of a change. He ate his food, rested in his humble bed, paid his charge, and received the ancient benediction from his host—

> "The Lord bless thee and keep thee;
> The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee;
> The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

But as he went on his way, a touch of something strange and fine rested upon him. Nor was this anything supernatural that had been done for the guest of the House of Chimham. It was only this—that the spirit of love and friendship had been immured there, and they who came within its walls found a hallowed peace. A man in the years gone by had given his hand and heart to the king, and when the king out of his heart's fulness gave him a temporal reward, he added also a spiritual reward. This it was that grew through the years, a pledge of kindness and hospitality in the house, a mortgage of love and friendship. And this it was that fell with the benediction of the host upon the guests of the House of Chimham.

Welcome indeed in the Bethlehem inn were those who came in distress to its threshold. Something

"AS HE WENT ON HIS WAY, A TOUCH OF SOMETHING STRANGE AND FINE RESTED UPON HIM."

large and generous there was in the spirit of this lodging-place, that appeared to expand and cover all the helplessness of men with a divine protection. Men said that the very walls of the House of Chimham were known to creak and groan in the effort to widen the space within, when there stood at the door a foot-sore and weary traveler.

Did the shepherd come for shelter, anxious and weary from long searchings in the hills for lost ones of his flock? Did men stop for a few brief hours of rest, hastening homeward at the message of disaster, sorrow or death? Did travelers come bruised by the perils of the way, and filled with many fears, pleading for nightly care? Did youth come, or middle age, or trembling old age, having found the way hard and long, and the nightfall close at hand?

To all such the House of Chimham smiled its welcome, bade them enter and be at rest. And often tired travelers, beset by many fears and perils of life, slept in the House of Chimham, and dreamed that Rest had entered their very souls, that the Dew of Youth had fallen upon their hearts. And in the morning they girded themselves anew and went on their way, for Fear had been left behind.

Once—it was four hundred years after Chimham built his inn—a party of warriors passed by on the way to Egypt. The battle had gone hard with them, and they were sore pressed with much fighting, and still the fear of the enemy was in their hearts. On this day the walls of the House of Chimham must have made music indeed with their groaning and cracking, for it was no small company with the men of war and

the women and the children. Yet we read in an old writing of the time that "they departed and dwelt in *Geruth Chimham*, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt, because of the Chaldeans, for they were afraid of them."

Most of all the House of Chimham gave its welcome to the stranger. If there came one who had found the world cold and friendless, who was a traveler from far and sought a friend, but found him not —to him *Geruth Chimham* was as a land of sunshine. For both in the desert and in the city the Law of the Stranger is written as with the finger of God. Alas! that men ever forget it.

"*A PRESENCE that disturbs me with the joy*
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns."

As the years went by, there came trembling into the hearts of those who kept the House of Chimham a Silent Expectation. Often it was like music heard afar—

"That swells, and sinks, and faints,
and falls, till all is still,"

but leaves in the heart a sense of something sweet. More often it was like unto a voice calling from the mountain-tops to men in the deep valleys, startling the heart's sluggish ways, and wakening the spiritual chivalry of the soul. Not a thing that they were clearly conscious of,

not a thing to be boldly proclaimed, it became nevertheless a silent factor of life, round which they drew unheralded thoughts, clustered quiet hopes, and built the dawn of a beautiful Tomorrow.

If ever any more wise or more bold than others ventured to put in words the meaning of the Expectation, their words were halting and their sentences broken. Yet it was plain that a vision was in their minds of some golden Largess of the future that would come to men; of some rich Friendship that would dower humanity's life in coming days; and, it might even be, of some Coming Guest, whose garments would smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia wood, and whose presence would be like the fragrance and beauty of the rose.

Even as they spoke of these things, dreaming by the fire and opening

their hearts to a guest more thoughtful than the rest, who listened with wonder in his eyes, the thought itself seemed to elude them. For men in every age have learned that their best thoughts cannot be held captive in words. Words make our feelings common; and they live the best who keep a kingdom of the mind untouched and unexpressed, that still doth let its riches fall silently, like blossoms of heavy-laden trees, upon the common day. If men could always articulate their feelings, the well of life would soon run dry.

But though the Expectation could not easily be spoken in words, it lived and grew within the hearts of men, and especially in the hearts of those who practiced the old art of love and hospitality in the House of Chimham. To them it grew to be a natural thought, which swelled in their bosoms like the bursting of a

rose into bloom. To them it seemed that some grand Traveler came from afar—he was already on the way, and one day he would come and be a guest in the House of Chimham. Guests came and went daily, but they were looking always, however dimly, for another Guest. Bands of pilgrims passed by going up to the city. Eagerly the men of *Geruth Chimham* scanned the faces of the band, if perchance there might be a Stranger among them who should be—

"He Himself with His human air."

Often too they were perplexed and doubtful lest they should fail to know him when he came. Yet an instinct within comforted them, and gave them quiet assurance. And so their hearts sang an unconscious refrain:

"Thou shalt know him when he comes
Not by any din of drums,

Nor the vantage of his airs ;
Neither by his crown,
Nor his gown,
Nor by anything he wears.
He shall only well-known be
By the holy harmony
That his coming makes in thee."

Little by little it grew to have healing power—this Hope of men's hearts. It was salve to their wounds, it was cordial to their weariness. Still more it was iron in their blood, and in the strength thereof they rose up to do those deeds of faith and courage which are the pride and joy of humanity. For men's minds are to them a kingdom, and their thoughts and hopes are the heralds of royalty.

Thus something indescribably fine and beautiful came by anticipation to the House of Chimham. Kindness dwelt there, not as an alien, but as a child at home. Love walked in and out and shed her benedictions on

every hand. Charity dressed herself in ever more beautiful garments, and cast her ornaments with careless freedom about her. Friendship too became a gentle, wholesome companion of men, that wooed them to high chivalries of the mind and beautiful deeds of courage. And Faith and Hope looked out of the windows upon the dreary world, and saw a growing Beauty in earth and sky.

So grew the Desire in the House of Chimham.

"FROM the gift looking to the Giver,
And from the cistern to the river,
And from the finite to infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity."

There were great stirrings in the Roman world. Looking out upon his vast Empire from his central throne in Rome, the Emperor grew ambitious to learn the statistics of his realm. "Let all the world be enrolled," said Cæsar; and his command was sufficient to set nations in commotion. In due time from all lands that confessed the sway of Rome the figures should be gathered for the census, and in some room of the Imperial Palace on the Palatine should be kept the written story, prepared by many hands, of the glory of Rome.

Into the most obscure corners of the Empire the behest of Augustus reached. In the narrow land of Syria Quirinius was the master of the Census, as he was also governor of the province. No doubt his task was well done: the system was perfect, the results painstaking and reliable. How little men knew, from Emperor to governor and common census-taker, that into the midst of these human plans the Glory of God would come!

A peasant pair traveled the road to Bethlehem, products of

> "The common growth of mother earth,
> Her simplest mirth and tears."

They journeyed from Nazareth of Galilee in the north. At noon on the last day of the journey they passed by the Holy City, and turned southward along the ancient road that led to the "city of David which is called Bethlehem."

The woman rode upon an ass; the man walked at her side. She was young and sweet-faced. A look of eager wistfulness lighted up her pensive countenance. At intervals something like a snatch of maidenly song escaped her lips. The man was swarthy and strong; yet there was about him a great tenderness of soul that made his words gentle and his actions gracious. Blithely they went upon their way: yet withal the man cast anxious glances now and then at the gentle-voiced woman at his side.

Was ever a more wondrous journey in all the world? Kings and queens have had their processions, and many eminent ones have walked the pathways of Earth. But the kindly light of sacred story rested not upon any of these. On this day came a man and a woman out of common life: and they walked in

the light of God. Wonder of wonders! that the world should wait so long for this journeying pair. They were going to Bethlehem to be enrolled, for they were of the house and lineage of David. Slow and uneventful the journey; but they were traveling, not alone the Bethlehem road, but the road that led onward into the world's Romance, and outward into that wondrous Providence which enwraps human love and sacrifice and suffering, and lifts "man's dust to God's divinity."

Jostling crowds passed them on the way, peering curiously into their faces and shouting their rude yet courteous greetings as they hastened by. None among them all knew that they had touched and slighted the Purpose of the Ages.

> "In the mud and scum of things
> Something always—always sings."

Once they lingered at the place where Rachel died in years gone by, and where Jacob set up a pillar, a place long sacred in the love men bear to women, and women to men.

"Our father Jacob never loved his fair-faced Rachel better than I love thee, sweet Mary." The man spoke with gentle emphasis.

"And thou, Joseph," she replied, "thou hast fully won a maiden's heart. Fair Rachel lay down here to die; but Jehovah's care is round about me."

"Blessed be His name! May it be ever so. Yonder is David's town, and soon thou shalt be resting within our great ancestor's home."

They were drawing near to the House of Bread. At the gateway they stopped to drink from the well at the gate, the same where royal David's soldiers drew water in jeop-

ardy of their lives, in that splendid rash act of years gone by. Presently they passed through the gate, and turned into a narrow street that led towards the center of the town. Did the voice of the prophet ring proudly in their hearts?

"Thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth; then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand, and shall feed his flock in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah his God; and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."

"O LITTLE town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night."

The long evening shadows were falling as the travelers entered the city of David; and the silence that comes with the night in an Eastern village was dropping like dew upon the house-tops. Nevertheless the town was full of strangers, for the decree of Augustus had swept like a wind into the villages of Judea and Samaria and Galilee, and beyond the Jordan as well; and had brought the children of the House of David

from near and far to David's town. How beautiful it must have seemed on that wintry evening, looking out from the hill-top upon the fields that swept gently away into the Judean desert, and farther still, into the great world's history! The two travelers had not been so filled with anxiety as to miss a thrill of eager excitement as they drew near to Bethlehem. To their awakened imagination it must have seemed that the sky bent down to kiss the little town; and the stars as they came out one by one were like beacon lights along the hills.

A new anxiety now filled their minds—the fear lest they might fail of a lodging-place. Inquiring in the street for the inn, they were directed to the edge of the town, where the field of Boaz touched it, glowing now in the late shadows of the evening light.

It was *Geruth Chimham*, the old lodging-place of Chimham. In that land so unchangeable despite many changes, the ancient inn had stood throughout the years, on the portion of land that belonged to the patrimony of David. It was standing still, and its door was flung invitingly open to the weary travelers.

A crowd of people filled the court of the caravansary, busy with the evening meal, and talking and gesticulating in Oriental fashion. In the babble of speech Joseph and Mary heard with glad hearts the rough bur of their own Galilean tongue.

The kindly host came out to meet them with the old welcome of the House of Chimham. But alas! there was no room for them in the inn. Every nook and cranny of the hospitable old khan was filled to overflowing. The enrolment had brought

such a multitude—never in all its history had the quiet town been so full, and many had stayed on beyond their time. The pride of David's people was great. They could scarce be driven away, the host said. The newcomers could see for themselves. The host was plainly distressed. The House of Chimham, he said, was not wont to close its doors to the stranger. But how could it be otherwise?

Joseph and Mary turned sadly away. Sympathetic eyes followed them, but none offered them a place. They were in the street again, and facing the necessity of spending the night under the open sky. In the midst of their distress a messenger overtook them. He came in breathless haste from the innkeeper at the House of Chimham. The host, he cried, was sorrowing for them—he could not let them go away. In the

day of King David's need Barzillai had received him and cared for him. Was not the House of Chimham itself the monument of that friendship? In all its years the House of Chimham had been pledged to hospitality. God forbid that any of the house and lineage of David should fail of hospitality in *Geruth Chimham!*

The messenger grew excited as he spoke. Was not the woman near to the hour of woman's pathetic joy? In his heart also the host feared to let them go away, lest the House of Chimham might miss some signal blessing of Jehovah. It was the old instinctive Desire to see among the faces of men a New Face of a Stranger grander than all—a Desire born of centuries of love and hope and faith. He could not give them a place in the inn, but in the stable he would prepare them room. Would

"THE EVENING MEAL WAS SOON BROUGHT, WITH A BOTTLE OF WATER."

they accept such lowly quarters? Clean sweet straw should be spread for their bed, and the master of the House would himself rejoice to look after their comfort. The hospitality of the House of Chimham, the messenger grandly affirmed, should extend even to the manger and the stall, and the humble beasts should join in welcome to the strangers.

The man and woman hesitated not a moment. Soon they entered the khan again and made their way among the crowd to the rear. The stable was close at hand. Indeed it was a roomy cave of a hill. Timbers were set up in front, and in the rear and on the sides of the cave were mangers and stalls for the cattle. The host with his servants was bustling to and fro, directing the preparation. The evening meal was soon brought, with a bottle of water.

The servants laid a bed of clean straw near one of the mangers.

So these children of the family of David lay down to rest under the protection of the House of Chimham, while the silent stars went by. Strange guidance that brought them —this Galilean pair—out of the years, out of common life, out of the night, into this lowly place of Light. And even as they lay down upon their common bed of straw, the mute cattle standing by, the unconscious world drew near. And in a little Book of great meaning we come upon a sentence that strikes down to the very roots of our humanity—

"*And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*"

In the silence of that wonderful

night in Bethlehem the world's Joy came with the coming of a little child. No pomp of circumstance or power was there. It was a homely, an intensely human scene, as if men were being taught that God is with us—*Immanuel*—with us in the last and lowest place of life. A palace for a birthplace would have left this truth untold. The low-vaulted stable, the common stalls, the rough-hewn manger, the pallet of straw, the mute cattle, the peasant-folk about, and withal the sweet-faced mother, in the divine art of motherhood, pressing her firstborn to her breast, and laying him, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in the manger close beside her—in such a scene as this at last we know

"How close is glory to the dust."

Outside the stars glistened in the cold sky, whilst yonder on the hill-

side in the field of Boaz a group of startled shepherds listened to an angel's proclamation—

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And as they listened, a "choir invisible" sang the world's anthem—

> "*Glory to God in the highest,*
> *And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased.*"

"FOR our joy and our health, Jesus Christ of Heaven
In poor man's apparell pursueth us ever,
And looketh upon us in their likeness; and that with lovely cheer
To know us by our kind heart, and casting of our eyes."

Did the host of the House of Chimham come in the morning with the shepherds from the hills, into the stable of the inn, to look with wonder upon the new-born babe lying so peacefully on the manger-straw? Did he look with gentle awe into the fathomless eyes of childhood and divine aught of the light reflected there? Did his mind thrill with spiritual excitement when he remembered that a

child of David's house and lineage had been born in the House which David gave to Barzillai's son? Did his heart swell with the memory of the ancient promises, and did he realize in the joy and harmony of his own heart that the Stranger for whom they had looked and longed had come at last—had come, humbly and sweetly as a little child, to take his place in the hearts of men?

Or was it later when the travel-worn Magi came from the East, following from afar a blazing star that beckoned them on, which having lost once they found again reflected in the waters of a wayside well, and followed until it stood glowing like a heavenly beacon above Bethlehem? And did the host of the House of Chimham stand in wonder looking on as, with reverent awe, these far-traveled men of the mysterious East opened their treasure and poured

rich gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh at the feet of the Child born in the House of Chimham? And did he realize however faintly that the House of Chimham had now received its spiritual reward, even as long ago King David had bestowed upon his kindly host in Gilead a temporal reward?

And do we who live in these late days, and read still with wonder in our hearts the story of the Bethlehem Child, realize that the House of Chimham was the rightful birthplace for such as He?

And does the truth dawn upon us in the fulness of these Christian days, that the Christ will always be born in the hearts of those who love and long and believe and serve, and look meanwhile for His Face among the travelers on the road?

This is the story of the House of Chimham.

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